

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

MARCH 10, 1858.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. BROWN made the following

REPORT.

[To accompany Bill S. 191.]

The Committee on the District of Columbia, to whom were referred various memorials and petitions from the corporate authorities, the trustees of the public schools, and citizens of the city of Washington, praying congressional aid for the public schools in said city, have had the same under consideration, and report :

First. That there are no unsold lots of material value in the city of Washington, and therefore it is useless to deny or grant so much of the prayer of the petitioners as seeks a donation of these lots to the public schools of said city.

Second. The policy of granting lands in aid of public schools in the new States and Territories appears to your committee to have been eminently wise and free from all constitutional objections. But when it is proposed, as by these memorialists, to extend that policy to the District of Columbia, new and grave objections arise. These objections are not only to the expediency, but, in the judgment of many, to the constitutionality of the proposed measure. Without discussing the question, your committee report that, in their opinion, it is not proper, at this time, to make a grant of public lands to aid the public schools in the city of Washington.

Third. The proposition to appropriate money in aid of these schools has engaged the attention of the committee.

It appears, according to the best data attainable by your committee, that the government owns about one-half in value of all the real estate in the city of Washington. On this it pays no taxes. The citizens are heavily taxed for the various purposes of city government, and the United States makes large appropriations for purposes of its own within said city. While the city appropriates largely from a common treasury for the support of schools, the United States never has appropriated a dollar for that object.

There are in the city of Washington more than five thousand children, between the ages of five and eighteen years, who attend no

school. Of these, it is believed, more than two-thirds have been attracted to this point by the government. They are the children of persons in the service of the United States, many of whom have no taxable property in the city, and very little anywhere else.

Of these five thousand who attend no school, one-half at least, perhaps more, are the children of parents too poor to bear the expense of their education, and they must grow up in ignorance, unless educated at the public expense. It would seem hardly fair to throw them as an exclusive burden on the private property-holders of this city.

There are in the public schools of the city two thousand four hundred pupils, besides three thousand two hundred in the private schools. The public schools are maintained mainly out of the city treasury, there being paid for their support an annual sum varying from twenty to twenty-five thousand dollars.

Your committee has found a healthy state of public sentiment in the city on the subject of education ; many of the largest property-holders not only consenting to, but urging, an additional special tax for school purposes. The assessed value of property in the city is a fraction over twenty-six millions of dollars, yielding a revenue, at the present rate of taxation, of one hundred and ninety-five thousand dollars, about nine per cent. of which is appropriated to the support of public schools. The city has a permanent school fund invested which yields three thousand dollars per annum ; and the poll tax, amounting to about five thousand five hundred dollars annually, goes also into the school fund. It is now proposed to levy an additional tax of ten cents in the hundred dollars for the special purpose of aiding the schools. This will raise about twenty-six thousand dollars per annum, which, added to the present sum expended, will be equal say to fifty thousand dollars a year. If the city was well supplied with school houses, this sum would go far towards meeting the desired object of placing a school within the reach of every child in the city ; but there is, unfortunately, a great deficiency in school accommodations.

In view of all these facts, your committee think it expedient for Congress to pass an act surrendering to the school fund of the city the fines and forfeitures in the district courts, and hereafter to be collected, until the same shall reach fifty thousand dollars, the money to be applied to the erection of permanent school houses.

The fines and forfeitures vary in amount per annum, according to the number and magnitude of offences against the criminal laws. In the years 1856 and 1857 the total of forfeitures was \$9,565 50, and of fines \$1,652 50. Of these sums only \$1,482 appears to have been collected. By surrendering this fund to the public schools there will be created an additional incentive to more rigid collections in future ; and thus the double benefit of aiding the schools, and punishing offenders with more certainty, will be obtained.

In addition to this provision, your committee propose an annual appropriation from the national treasury of twenty thousand dollars, for five years, on the condition that the citizens submit to the tax above alluded to—that is, a tax of about \$26,000 in the aggregate, for the special purposes of the public schools, and this to be in addition to the sums now paid by them. Thus the government will pay, for

limited time, about one part, and the citizens two parts of the expense of keeping up the public schools; and it is hoped, with this aid, these schools in five years will be put on such a solid foundation that they can be sustained without aid from the government.

In accordance with these views, your committee report a bill.

